

An open letter to Urban Meyer,

Yes it is well known how macho your football team is for they still do the “Bull in the Ring” drill. You even have your quarterback Braxton Miller do it, just to show how tough your team is. Very macho, I know. But isn’t it funny how the pros don’t do these drills? Not a single team in the NFL does it because they know how dangerous it is.

With Ohio State doing this—and other extreme contact drills—it sends a signal to coaches in high school and youth football leagues that these drills are okay. But with all the studies on concussions, you know deep down, as well as I do, that these drills are not okay.

The pros hardly hit in practice and don’t have two-a-days, or spring football, but the colleges and high schools still do both. Why? To prove a point?

I would like to take you, Mr. Meyer, to one of my University of Michigan football reunions. To see Dan Dierdorf walking with a cane, if you can even call it walking. To see 56 year-old Walt Downing have memory problems, like a person with Alzheimer’s. To hear 54 year-old Kurt Becker tell of his full disability from the NFL.

Or see a member of my family have dementia from concussions from playing football his entire life. Or see me take a memory test last year. And worrying that I am starting to have dementia problems.

Come see the surgical scar on my son’s shoulder from when he was 12 years old, because his coach had him do your great “Bull in the Ring” drill. Yes, just a child of 12 years old; see his mother cry watching him go into surgery.

It makes me sick to my stomach and wince to drive by Mayfield Park and see 8-9-10 year old kids in full pads in 90 degree weather practicing 4 times a week. Can’t you start in September when it’s cooler, do 8-10 year olds really need to play tackle football? Besides quarterback you don’t need to play early to get a scholarship or get to the hall of fame. Moms wake up! The studies prove that head contact early is leading to dementia. I played one year of contact at age 13 and got a scholarship and played pro and left Michigan third-leading tackler in history.

I’m sure, Urban, you are scheming to get the high schools up north to have spring football like they do down south - I mean Urban we need to compete with the SEC don’t we? Funny the pros don’t have spring contact drills and no hitting in practice after a certain date and kickoffs on the 30, but not our great college institutions. Take the lead Urban. Take the lead. (Editor’s note: Starting in 2012, NCAA rules set kickoffs at the 35-yard line, as in the NFL.)

Yeah, you’re a tough guy, Urban, and hopefully in 30 years when these players come back crippled you will be there for them then. You have millions, will you be charitable when they come back injured from your drills? And yes they will come back and you will be sick to your stomach when they do.

When will we stop the madness? Urban, you can do it now. Let’s all be more like Ted Ginn, coach at Glenville High School, when asked about the possibility of changing the playoff format, he said, “Who cares, I am saving lives.”

Now that’s a tough guy.

Andy Cannavino (Bo’s greatest captain, as told in his book)

University of Michigan 1977-81 (Captain 1980)  
St. Joseph High School, class of 1977  
Detroit Lions, NFL 1981 (10<sup>th</sup> round pick)  
Michigan Panthers, USFL 1983-1985